

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend Claims 1, 4, 6, 10, 13, 14, 16, 18, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27 and 28 as follows. The claims, as pending in the subject application, read as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A method of augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the method comprising:

adding one of a plurality of self-describing attribute tags to said at least one meta-data element, said self-describing attribute tag indicating whether said meta-data element, and a corresponding similarly identified meta-data element from a further digital image should be retained or discarded[[,]] in a case ~~that~~ where the two images are combined, wherein the retention or discarding of the meta-data elements is dependent on the configuration of the meta-data elements.

2. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the meta-data elements in question should both be discarded in a case where the two images are combined.

3. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the meta-data elements in question should both be retained individually in a case where the two images are combined.

4. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the meta-data elements in question should be retained as a single element in a case where values of the meta-data elements are the same, or otherwise ~~and~~ discarded in a case where the two images are combined.

5. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein in the event the image has associated therewith a meta-data element having no self describing attribute tag, then the method further comprises the step of:

supplying a default self describing attribute tag to the meta-data element which has no self describing attribute tag.

6. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 5, wherein the default self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the meta-data elements in question should be retained as a single element in a case where values of the meta-data elements are the same, or otherwise ~~and~~ discarded in a case where the images are combined.

7. (Currently Amended) A method of augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the method comprising:

adding one of a plurality of self describing attribute tags to said at least one meta-data element, said self-describing attribute tag indicating whether said meta-data element should be retained or discarded in ~~the~~ a case where the digital image is

transformed, wherein the retention or discarding of the meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of the meta-data element.

8. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 7, wherein the self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the meta-data element in question should be discarded in a case where the image is transformed.

9. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 7, wherein the self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the meta-data element in question should be retained in a case where the image is transformed.

10. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 8 7, wherein in the event the image has associated therewith a meta-data element having no attribute tag, then the method further comprises the step of:

supplying a default self describing attribute tag to the meta-data element which has no attribute tag.

11. (Previously Presented) A method of combining meta-data associated with a plurality of images, wherein the images each have associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one corresponding meta-data element having associated therewith one of a plurality of attribute tags which indicate whether a corresponding meta-data element should be retained or discarded in a case where the images are combined, the method comprising the steps of:

reading the attribute tag of each meta-data element to identify whether the corresponding meta-data element should be retained or discarded; and

combining one or more similar meta-data elements associated with the images, and retaining or discarding the combined meta-data elements and one or more further meta-data elements, depending on the attribute tags corresponding to those meta-data elements.

12. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 11, wherein the attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the meta-data elements in question should be discarded in a case where the images are combined.

13. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 11, wherein the attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the meta-data elements in question should be retained in ~~the a case that~~ where the images are combined.

14. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 11, wherein the attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the meta-data elements in question should be retained as a single element in ~~the a case that~~ where their values are the same, or otherwise ~~else~~ discarded in ~~the a case that~~ where the images are combined.

15. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 11, wherein in the event the image has associated therewith a meta-data element having no attribute tag, then the method comprises the step of:

supplying a default attribute tag to the meta-data element which has no attribute tag.

16. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein the default attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the meta-data elements in question should be retained as a single element in a case where values of the meta-data elements are the same, or otherwise ~~and~~ discarded, in a case where the images are combined.

17. (Previously Presented) A method of retaining meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the image has associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one meta-data element having associated therewith one of a plurality of attribute tags which indicate whether the meta-data element should be retained or discarded in a case where the image is transformed, the method comprising the steps of:

reading the attribute tag of the meta-data element to identify whether the meta-data element should be retained or discarded; and

retaining the meta-data element of the image depending on the attribute tag corresponding to the meta-data element, wherein the retention of the meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of each meta-data element.

18. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 17, wherein the ~~at least one~~ attribute tag ~~includes~~ is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention is that the meta-data element in question should be discarded in ~~the a case that~~ a case that where the image is transformed.

19. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 17, wherein the attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention is that the meta-data element in question should be retained in a case where the image is transformed.

20. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 17, wherein in the event the image has associated therewith a meta-data element having no attribute tag, then the method further comprises the step of:

supplying a default attribute tag to the meta-data element which has no attribute tag.

21. (Previously Presented) An apparatus for augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the apparatus comprising:

a processor for adding one of a plurality of self-describing attribute tags to said at least one meta-data element, said self-describing attribute tag indicating whether said meta-data element and a corresponding similarly identified meta-data element from another digital image should be retained or discarded in a case where the two images are combined, wherein the retention or discarding of the meta-data elements is dependent on the configuration of the meta-data elements.

22. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the apparatus comprising:

a processor for adding one of a plurality of self describing attribute tags to said at least one meta-data element, said self-describing attribute tag indicating whether said meta-data element should be retained or discarded in ~~the a case that~~ where the digital image is transformed, wherein the retention or discarding of the meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of the meta-data element.

23. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for combining meta-data associated with a plurality of images, wherein the images each have associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one corresponding meta-data element having associated therewith ~~an~~ one of a plurality of attribute tags which indicates whether the corresponding meta-data element is to be retained or discarded in a case where the images are combined, the apparatus comprising:

a reading device that reads the attribute tag of each meta-data element to identify whether the corresponding meta-data element should be retained or discarded; and

a processor for combining one or more similar meta-data elements associated with the images, and for retaining or discarding the combined meta-data elements and one or more further meta-data elements depending on the attribute tags associated with those meta-data elements.

24. (Previously Presented) An apparatus for retaining meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the image has associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one meta-data element having associated therewith one of a plurality of attribute tags

which indicate whether the corresponding meta-data element should be retained or discarded in the case where the image is transformed, the apparatus comprising:

a reading device that reads the attribute tag of each meta-data element to identify whether the corresponding meta-data element should be retained or discarded; and

a processor for retaining each meta-data element of the image depending on the attribute tag of each corresponding meta-data element, wherein the retention of each meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of each meta-data element.

25. (Currently Amended) A computer-readable medium including a computer program for augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the computer program comprising:

code for adding one of a plurality of self-describing attribute tags to at least one meta-data element, said self-describing attribute tag indicating whether said meta-data element and a corresponding similarly identified meta-data element from a further digital image should be retained ~~are or~~ discarded in ~~the a~~ case ~~that~~ where the two images are combined, wherein the retention or discarding of the meta-data elements is dependent on the configuration of each meta-data element.

26. (Currently Amended) A computer-readable medium including a computer program for augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the computer program comprising:

code for adding one of a plurality of a self describing attribute tags to at least one meta-data element, said self-describing attribute tag indicating whether said



meta-data element should be retained or discarded in ~~the a case that~~ where the digital image is transformed, wherein the retention or discarding of the meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of the meta-data element.

27. (Currently Amended) A computer-readable medium including a computer program for combining meta-data associated with a plurality of images, wherein the images each have associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one corresponding meta-data element having associated therewith one of a plurality of attribute tags which indicate whether the corresponding meta-data element should be retained or discarded in ~~the a case that~~ where images are combined, the computer program comprising:

code for reading the attribute tag of each meta-data element to identify whether the corresponding meta-data element should be retained or discarded; and

code for combining one or more similar meta-data elements associated with the images, and retaining or discarding the combined meta-data elements and one or more further meta-data elements, depending on the attribute tags associated with those meta-data elements.

28. (Currently Amended) A computer-readable medium including a computer program for retaining meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the image has associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one meta-data element having associated therewith one of a plurality of attribute tags which indicate whether the meta-data element should be retained or discarded in ~~the a case that~~ where the image is transformed, the computer program comprising:

code for reading the attribute tag of each meta-data element to identify whether the meta-data element should be retained or discarded; and

code for retaining each meta-data element of the image depending on the attribute tag associated with each meta-data element, wherein the retention of each meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of each meta-data element.